

CONCERNING
FREQUENT COMMUNION
OF THE IMMACULATE MYSTERIES OF CHRIST





The Works of Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite

Volume 1: Exomologetarion – A Manual of Confession

Volume 2: Concerning Frequent Communion

Volume 3: Confession of Faith



Detail of the Mystical Supper, Katholicon, Holy Monastery of Stavronikita, Mount Athos.

**CONCERNING
FREQUENT COMMUNION
OF THE IMMACULATE MYSTERIES OF CHRIST**

by our Righteous God-bearing Father
Nikodemos the Hagiorite

INCLUDING

A thorough explanation of the Lord's Prayer,
an apology for frequent communion, answers to
objections and clarifications of misconceptions,
and two appendices on the Divine Eucharist

Translated by Fr. George Dokos



Uncut Mountain Press

CONCERNING FREQUENT COMMUNION OF THE IMMACULATE MYSTERIES OF CHRIST

Copyright © 2006
by Uncut Mountain Press

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Designed and published in Thessalonica, Greece by Uncut Mountain Press. Distributed by Uncut Mountain Supply, The Dalles, Oregon.

www.uncutmountain.com www.uncutmountainsupply.com

This translation has been made from the Greek text of the first edition published by Nektarios Panagopoulos (Athens, 2001).

Front Cover Photograph: Portable icon from the Holy Monastery of the Paraclete, Oropos, Greece.

Back Cover Photograph: Portable icon from the Holy Monastery of St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, Goumenissa, Greece.

Scriptural quotations are primarily taken from the King James Version. The translator to better reflect the original Greek text has emended some quotations. All citations of the Psalms are taken from *The Psalter According to the Seventy*, translated from the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, MA.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nikodemos the Hagiorite, Saint, 1749-1809

Concerning Frequent Communion of the Immaculate Mysteries of Christ / by Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite: translated and annotated by George Dokos. – 1st ed.

ISBN: 960-86778-5-8

I. Christianity – Eastern Orthodox Spirituality

II. Christianity – Spiritual Instruction

Manufactured in the Republic of Greece

Published August, 2006

*Verily, verily, I say unto you,
Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man,
and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.
Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood,
hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.
He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood,
dwelleth in Me, and I in him.*
John 6:53-56

*Ἀφιερῶνται πᾶσι τοῖς μυσταγωγοῖς,
Τῆς ἡμῶν Ἐκκλησίας Ἀποστολικῆς,
Οἷς ἀνήχασιν ἡμᾶς εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς,
Καὶ εἰς τὰ βαθέα μυστήρια Θεοῦ.*



Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite, Katholikon, Annunciation Monastery, Patmos.

Apolytikion

Tone 3. Awed by the beauty.

Adorned wast thou O Father by the grace of wisdom*
inspired thou appeared as* a trumpet of the Spirit*
and as a teacher of virtues* Nikodemos who speaks of God*
for to all hast thou offered* teachings of salvation*
and purity of life* pouring forth enlightenment*
by the richness of thy virtuous writings*
through which as light thou hast illumined the world.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	13
A brief history of the present book	17
Abbreviations	29
PROLOGUE	33

PART ONE

EXPLANATION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

Foreword to the Lord's prayer	43
CHAPTER ONE: Our Father Who art in the heavens	45
CHAPTER TWO: Hallowed be Thy Name	50
CHAPTER THREE: Thy kingdom come	53
CHAPTER FOUR: Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven	55
CHAPTER FIVE: Give us this day our superessential bread	57
CHAPTER SIX: And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors	70
CHAPTER SEVEN: And lead us not into temptation	74
CHAPTER EIGHT: But deliver us from the evil one	79
CHAPTER NINE: Conclusion: For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, unto the ages. Amen	80
Afterward to the Lord's Prayer	81

PART TWO

CONCERNING FREQUENT COMMUNION

CHAPTER ONE: It is necessary for the Orthodox to Partake frequently of the Divine body and blood of our Lord	85
CHAPTER TWO: Frequent Reception of the Holy mysteries is Beneficial and Salvific	104
CHAPTER THREE: Infrequent Communion causes great harm	123

PART THREE

OBJECTIONS - CLARIFICATIONS

OBJECTION 1	133
OBJECTION 2	136
OBJECTION 3	143
OBJECTION 4	147
OBJECTION 5	149
OBJECTION 6	156
OBJECTION 7	160
OBJECTION 8	162
OBJECTION 9	165
OBJECTION 10	169
OBJECTION 11	173
OBJECTION 12	178
OBJECTION 13	185
EPILOGUE	188

Table of contents	11
-------------------	----

APPENDIX A

**ON WHAT THE MYSTERY OF THE DIVINE
EUCHARIST REPRESENTS**

1. The greatness of the gift	197
2. The love of the person giving the gift	202
3. The benefit enjoyed by the person receiving the gift	209
Eighth Reading	215

APPENDIX B

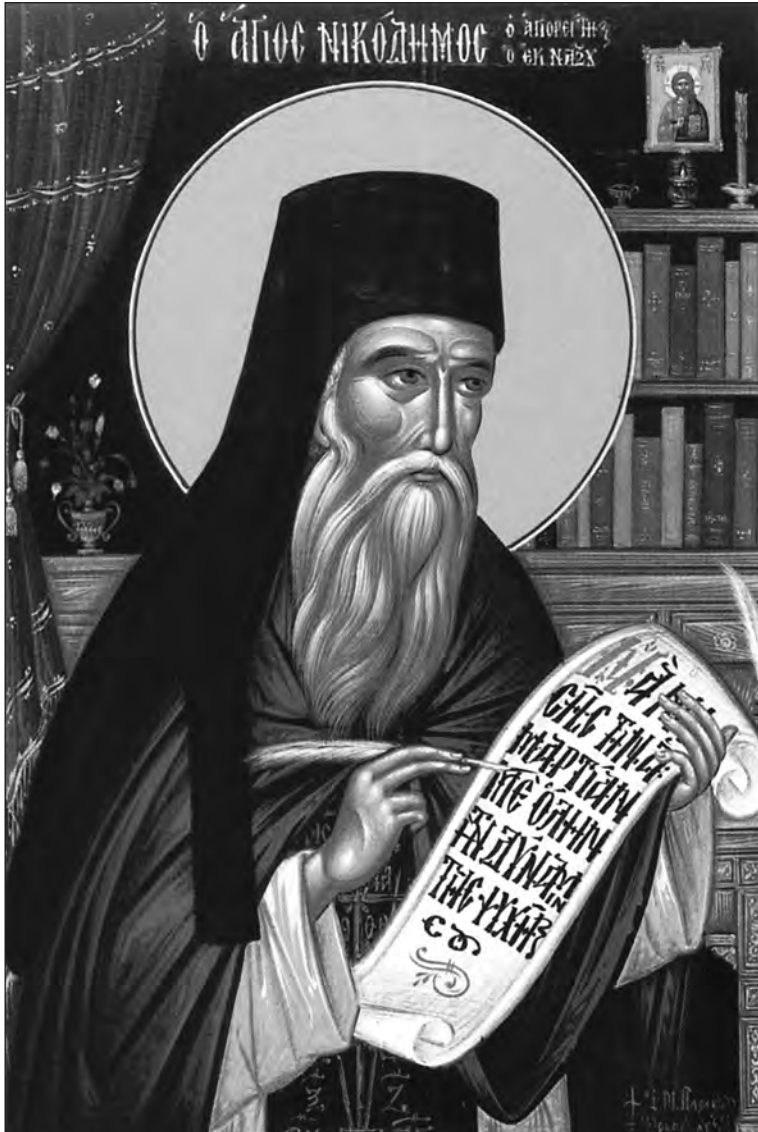
**CONCERNING THE MYSTERY
OF THE DIVINE EUCHARIST**

217

SCRIPTURAL INDEX	233
Old Testament	233
New Testament	234

INDEX OF SUBJECTS AND NAMES	237
-----------------------------	-----

New and Forthcoming Publications	242
----------------------------------	-----





PART TWO

CONCERNING FREQUENT COMMUNION

CHAPTER 1

It Is Necessary for the Orthodox to Partake Frequently of the Divine Body and Blood of Our Lord

All Orthodox Christians are commanded to receive Communion frequently. First, by the orders of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. Second, by the Acts and Canons of the Holy Apostles and the sacred Councils and by the testimonies of the divine Fathers. Third, by the very words, the order, and the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Fourth, by Holy Communion in and of itself.

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ, before He handed down the Mystery of Communion, said: “And the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (Jn. 6:51). This means that, for the faithful, divine Communion is a necessary constituent of the spiritual life in Christ. This spiritual life in Christ is not to be extinguished or interrupted — as the Apostle says: “Quench not the Spirit” (1 Th. 5:19) —

but must be continuous and uninterrupted, “that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15), according to the words of the same Apostle. That is, the living faithful are no longer to live a selfish and carnal life, but the life of Christ, Who died and resurrected for them. Necessarily, then, it is required that divine Communion, the constituent of this spiritual life, also be uninterrupted.

And in another place the Lord says imperatively: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you” (Jn. 6:53). These words make apparent that divine Communion is just as necessary for the Christian as Holy Baptism. For He used the same double expression when speaking about Baptism and about Communion. Concerning Baptism, He said: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). Concerning divine Communion, He likewise said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you” (Jn. 6:53). Therefore, just as without Baptism it is impossible for one to live the spiritual life and be saved, it is impossible for one to live without divine Communion. But since these two have this difference, that Baptism is to occur but one time, while divine Communion is to occur frequently and daily, it is right to conclude that there are two requirements respecting divine Communion: one, that it is to be received; and the other, that it is to be received frequently.

When the Lord handed down this Mystery to His disciples, He did not merely make a recommendation, saying: “Whoever

wants to eat My body, and whoever wants to drink My blood” – as He did when He said, “Whoever wants to follow Me,”⁶⁸ and, “If you want to be perfect.”⁶⁹ Rather, He commandingly cried out: “Take, eat; this is My body” (Mt. 26:26), and, “Drink of it, all of you, this is My blood” (Mt. 26:27–28). That is, “You must absolutely eat My body, and you must unfailingly drink My blood.” Again He says: “This do in remembrance of Me” (Lk. 22:19). That is, “I am delivering this Mystery to you so that you might celebrate it, not one, two, or three times, but every day (as the divine Chrysostom interprets it),⁷⁰ unto the remembrance of My sufferings, My death, and My whole incarnate economy.”

Behold how these words of the Lord clearly present the two requirements respecting Communion, the one by the fundamental command they contain, and the other by the frequency signified by the words “this do;” and this clearly means that we are strongly commanded not only to commune, but also to commune often. Everyone, therefore, can now see that an Orthodox is not allowed to transgress these things, no matter his order.⁷¹ Rather, he is absolutely obligated and required to keep them, and to receive them as commands and ordinances of the Master.

2. The divine Apostles, following this commanding directive of our Lord, at the beginning of their preaching

⁶⁸ Cf. Mt. 16:24.

⁶⁹ Cf. Mt. 19:21.

⁷⁰ Cf. *On Ephesians* 3.4–5, PG 62, 29; NPNF (V1-13), 64.

⁷¹ Translator’s note: That is, whether he is ordained, a monastic, or a layperson.

gathered together as soon as they could with all of the faithful in a hidden place, for fear of the Jews. There they taught the Christians, praying and celebrating the Mystery, and they and all gathered there with them communed, as the sacred Luke bears witness in the Acts of the Apostles. There, he says that the three thousand people who believed in Christ on the day of Pentecost and were baptized were with the Apostles in order to listen to their teaching and to benefit from it, to pray together, and to commune of the immaculate Mysteries in order to be sanctified and to be more firmly established in the faith of Christ: “And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine, and in Communion, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

And in order for later Christians to keep this mandatory tradition of the Lord, and in order for it not to be forgotten over time, that which the Apostles practiced they also wrote in their eighth and ninth Canons, commanding in exact detail, and with the threat of the penance of excommunication, that no one is to remain uncommunled of the divine Mysteries: “If anyone... does not receive Communion when the offering is made, let him declare the reason; and, if it is legitimate, let him be excused. But if he does not declare it, let him be excommunicated.”⁷²

And in the ninth Canon they say: “Any of the faithful who enter in and listen to the Scriptures, but do not stay for the prayers and Holy Communion, are to be

⁷² Canon 8 of the Holy Apostles (*Pedalion* [Athens: Papademetriou, 2003], 11; *The Rudder*, [Chicago: The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1983], 20).

excommunicated, as causing disorder in the Church.”⁷³ Explaining this Canon, Theodore Balsamon says: “The ordinance of the present Canon is very severe, for it excommunicates those who go to Church but do not remain until the end or receive Communion. And other Canons also designate the same thing, so that all will be prepared and worthy to receive Communion.”⁷⁴

Following the sacred Apostles, the Council in Antioch first ratifies the above Canons, and then adds:

Any who enter the Church of God and listen to the sacred Scriptures, but do not participate in prayer with the people, or who turn away from the Communion of the Eucharist, by reason of some disorder, are to be cast out of the Church until they have made confession, and shown fruits of repentance, and made entreaty, and then they will be able to be forgiven.⁷⁵

My brothers, do you now see that all Christians are subject to mandatory excommunication and must receive Communion frequently? And that they are required to do so at every Divine Liturgy, in order that they not be excommunicated by the sacred Apostles and by the Holy Council?

3. If we look carefully at the sacred Divine Liturgy, we will see that, from beginning to end, it has as its goal and reference the Communion of the gathered faithful Christians. For the prayers which the priest reads silently, those which he says aloud, and, simply, all of the sacred words, rituals,

⁷³ *Pedalion*, 11; *The Rudder*, 21.

⁷⁴ PG 137, 53B.

⁷⁵ Canon 2 (*Pedalion*, 407; *The Rudder*, 535).

and directions of the Divine Liturgy show this.

Concerning the silent prayers, in the Second Prayer of the Faithful it is written: “Grant them (the faithful, that is) always to worship Thee with fear and love, and without guilt and condemnation to partake of the Holy Mysteries.” In the prayer recited after the completion of the Mysteries⁷⁶ it is written: “That to those who shall partake thereof they may be unto vigilance of soul, unto forgiveness of sins.” The prayer before Communion says: “And vouchsafe, by Thy mighty hand, to give to us Thine immaculate body and Thy precious blood, and through us, to all Thy people.”

Concerning those things which are said aloud, the priest, as if the Lord is speaking, cries out to the people, “Take, eat; this is My body,” and, “Drink of it, all of you, this is My blood.” Holding the sacred chalice containing the life-giving body and blood, the priest exits from the sanctuary and holds it up for all the people to see. He then calls them to divine Communion, shouting aloud: “With the fear of God, with faith, and with love, draw near.” That is, come forth in order to receive, with the fear of God, with faith and love, the divine Mysteries.

After Communion, the priest and the people thank God that they have been deemed worthy of this great grace. The people offer thanksgiving: “Let our mouths be filled with Thy praise, O Lord... for Thou hast deemed us worthy to partake of Thy holy, immortal, and immaculate Mysteries.” The priest says: “Upright, having received the divine, holy, immaculate, and life-giving Mysteries, let us worthily give thanks to the Lord.” Namely, “O brothers, since we have

⁷⁶ Translator’s note: That is, after the sanctification of the Holy Gifts.

all received the holy and life-giving Mysteries with an upright conscience, let us with one voice give thanks to the Lord for this.”

If one considers the Cherubic Hymn which is chanted by the people, he will see that it too is a preparation for Communion. For it says that all of us, who mystically represent the many-eyed Cherubim, and who chant the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, are to cast out from our intellect every concern and care of this life, because we are going to partake of and receive into our soul the King of all, Who is invisibly surrounded by the orders of the heavenly angels.

The Lord’s Prayer, which is recited after the transubstantiation of the Mysteries, also indicates this. For by this prayer Christians ask from God the Father to give them the superessential bread, which is primarily Holy Communion, as we said earlier, in the first part of this book. Even the names by which the Divine Liturgy is especially called, that is, “Communion” and “Synaxis” [that is, “Gathering”], refer in some way to frequent Communion. For “Communion” and “Synaxis” denote that, through the reception of the body and blood of Christ, all the faithful are gathered together in communion and are united with Christ, and they become one body and one spirit with Him.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Cf. Eph. 4:4. [Translator’s note: That the faithful who partake of the deified body of Christ in the Eucharist are transformed into that very immortal and incorruptible body, thus truly becoming one body with Him, see Justin Martyr, *Apologia* 1.66, PG 6, 428C-429A (ANF [01], 185), Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio Catechetica* 37, PG 45, 93A-93B (NPNF [V2-05], 504-505), and Cyril of Alexandria, *In Joannis Evangelium* 4.2, PG 73, 577B-580A.]

So, based on all of these sacred rituals of the Divine Liturgy, I ask you, my brothers, to tell me in the fear of God and in the good conscience of your soul, is it not obvious that Christians who attend the Liturgy are required to commune frequently? Are they not obligated to do this in order to show that it is a communion, a gathering, and a supper, and so that they may not be shown to be transgressors of those very things which they believe and confess during the Liturgy? If, however, they do not receive Communion as they have confessed during the Liturgy, I fear, I truly fear, that they might be found to be transgressors. But also, regarding the priest's call to them to come forward, and the other sacred words, acts, and rituals which take place during the Divine Liturgy—I no longer know if they are even in their correct places. For every single person withdraws, so that not even a single Christian is found to approach the Holy Mysteries, to obey such an invitation from the priest—or, to state it better, from God. But rather, the priest, having done nothing, turns back with the Holy Things, without anyone having accepted his invitation to come forward and receive Communion.

For this reason, the divine Chrysostom, following the sacred Canons of the Holy Apostles and of the sacred Council which we previously mentioned, and certainly considering how all of the sacred rituals of the Divine Liturgy look to the Communion of the faithful, judges those people who go to the Liturgy and do not commune to be unworthy even of entering into the Church:

I observe many partaking of Christ's body lightly and haphazardly, and rather from custom and form than from consideration and understanding. "When," says

someone, “the season of Holy Lent sets in,” whatever kind of person he may be, he partakes of the Mysteries, or, when the day of Theophany comes. And yet it is not Epiphany nor is it Lent that makes someone worthy of approaching, but it is sincerity and purity of soul. With this, approach at all times; without it, never. ”For as often,” the Apostle says, “as ye do this, ye proclaim the Lord’s death” (1 Cor. 11:26), that is to say, “you make a remembrance of the salvation that has been wrought for you, and of the benefits which I have bestowed.” Consider those who partook of the sacrifice under the Old Covenant, what great abstinence did they not practice! How did they not conduct themselves! What did they not perform! They were always purifying themselves. And do you, when you draw nigh to the Sacrifice, at which the very angels tremble, do you measure the matter by the revolutions of the seasons? And how will you present yourself before the judgment-seat of Christ, you who presume upon His body with polluted hands and lips?

...Observe the vast inconsistency of the thing. At the other times you do not come, no – not that you are often clean. But at Pascha, however flagrant an act you may have committed, you come. O the force of custom and of prejudice! In vain is the daily Sacrifice. In vain do we stand before the altar: there is no one to partake. These things I am saying, not to induce you simply to partake, but that you should render yourselves worthy to partake.

Are you not worthy of the Sacrifice, or of receiving it? If so, then neither are you of the prayers. You hear the herald (the deacon, that is), standing, and saying: “As many as are in penitence, all pray.” As many as do

not partake, are in penitence. If you are one of those that are in penitence, you ought not to partake; for he that does not partake is one of those that are in penitence. Why then when he says: "Depart, you that are not qualified to pray," do you have the audacity to stand still? But no, you are not of that number, you are of the number of those who are able to partake, and yet you are indifferent about it and regard the matter as nothing.

Look, I entreat. A royal Table is set before you, angels minister at that Table, the King Himself is there, and do you stand gaping? Are your garments defiled, and yet you make no account of it? Or are they clean? Then fall down and partake. Every day He comes in to see the guests, and converses with them all. Yes, at this moment is He speaking to your conscience: "Friend, how do you stand here, not having on a wedding garment?" He did not say: "Why did you sit down?" No, before the man sat down and before he even entered the feast, He declared him to be unworthy. He does not say: "Why did you sit down to eat," but: "Why did you come in?" And these are the words that He is at this very moment addressing to one and all of us who stand here with such shameless audacity. For everyone that does not partake of the Mysteries is standing here in shameless audacity. It is for this reason that they which are in sins are first of all put out of the Church.

For, when a master is present at his table, it is not right that those servants who have offended him should be present; but rather they are sent out. Just so here, when the Sacrifice of the Lamb is brought forth, and Christ, the Master's Sheep, is sacrificed, when you hear

the words: "Let us pray together," when you behold the curtains drawn up, then imagine that the heavens are let down from above, and that the angels are descending! As it is not then right that any one of the uninitiated should be present, so neither should be present one of them who, though initiated, are at the same time defiled.

Tell me, suppose someone was invited to a feast, and was to wash his hands, and sit down, and be all ready at the table, and after all that, refuse to partake. Is he not insulting the man who invited him? Were it not better for such a person never to have come at all? Now it is in just the same way that you have come here. You have sung the hymn with the rest: you have declared yourself to be of the number of them that are worthy by not departing with them that are unworthy. Why stay, and yet not partake of the Table? "I am unworthy," you will say. Then you are also unworthy of that communion you have had in the prayers. For it is not by means of the offerings only, but also by means of those songs that the Spirit descends all around. Do we not see our own servants first scouring the table with a sponge, cleaning the house, and then setting out the entertainment? This is what is done by the prayers, by the cry of the herald. We scour the Church, as it were, with a sponge, that all things may be set out in a pure Church, that there may be "neither spot nor wrinkle" (Eph. 5:27). Unworthy, indeed, are our eyes of these sights, and unworthy our ears! "And if even a beast," it is said, "touch the mountain, it shall be stoned" (Ex. 19:13). Thus then they were not worthy so much as to set foot on it, but afterwards they came near and beheld where God had stood. And you may,

afterwards, come near and behold; however, when He is present, depart. You are no more allowed to be here than the catechumen is. For indeed, to have never reached the Mysteries is not at all the same thing, as, when you have reached them, to stumble before them and despise them, and to make yourself unworthy of this.

One might enter upon more points, and those more awful still. However, not to burden your understanding, these will suffice. They who are not brought to their right senses with these, certainly will not be with more. That I may not then be the means of increasing your condemnation, I entreat you not to forbear coming, but to render yourselves worthy both of being present and of approaching. Tell me, were any king to give command and say: "If any man does this, let him partake of my table," would you not do all you could to be admitted? He has invited us to heaven, to the Table of the great and wonderful King, and do we shrink and hesitate, instead of hastening and running to it? And what then is our hope of salvation? We cannot lay the blame on our weakness; we cannot lay it on our nature. It is indolence and nothing else that renders us unworthy.⁷⁸

Do you hear, my brother, what this great teacher of the Church says? That those who are not prepared to receive Communion (though they do not have an impediment) are not even worthy to attend the Divine Liturgy.

But how do you respond? You say: "If this is how things are, then I just won't go to Liturgy at all."

No, my brother, no. You are not even allowed to do this,

⁷⁸ *On Ephesians* 3, 4–5, PG 62, 28–30; NPNF (V1-13), 63–65.

for you will be excommunicated, as the Holy and Sixth (Quinisext) Ecumenical Council decrees: “If anyone... being in town does not go to Church on three consecutive Sundays — that is, three weeks — if he is a cleric let him be deposed, but if he is a layman, let him be cut off from Communion.”⁷⁹ This is also decreed by the eleventh Canon of the Holy and sacred Local Council in Sardica.⁸⁰

So then, beloved, you are subject to the penance of excommunication if you do not do both things, namely, attend the Liturgy, and prepare yourself, as much as possible, to receive Communion if you do not have an impediment. You cannot transgress either the one or the other.

By doing this, you are observing all of the sacred rituals of the Divine Liturgy, as we said previously, and you do not transgress the order which the Church received from our very Lord, from the Apostles, from the Councils, and from the Saints. And this is the order: for the Holy Bread to be divided at every Divine Liturgy, and for the faithful (that is, the faithful who do not have an impediment) to partake of it.

This is what Symeon of Thessaloniki says: “The Divine Liturgy is a rite during which the all-holy body and blood of Christ itself is consecrated and then given to all of the faithful in Communion, and Communion is the sole purpose of the Divine Liturgy.”⁸¹

The sacred Bishop of Dyrachios, Nicholas Cabasilas, writes: “The work of the Holy Rite of the sacred Mysteries

⁷⁹ Canon 80 (*Pedalion*, 290; *The Rudder*, 384).

⁸⁰ Cf. *Pedalion*, 454; *The Rudder*, 592.

⁸¹ Cf. *De Sacra Liturgia*, ch. 99, PG 155, 300B.

is the change of the divine Gifts into the divine body and blood; and its purpose is for the faithful to be sanctified through them.”⁸²

The wise Job (to whom the sacred Photios bears witness in his *Myriobiblon* or *Bibliotheca*) says in the work *On the Mysteries* that “the entire Divine Liturgy signifies and points to the Communion of the Mysteries, for this is its aim, purpose, and work, namely, for the faithful to receive the life-giving and dread Mysteries.”⁸³

Gabriel of Philadelphia, in the work entitled *On the Mysteries*, says that the Divine Liturgy takes place for three reasons. First, unto the glory and praise of our God and Savior, and unto the remembrance of His death and resurrection, just as He said: “This do in remembrance of Me” (Lk. 22:19). Second, for the repose and sanctification of the souls of pious Orthodox Christians who have fallen asleep.⁸⁴ And, third, for the living.⁸⁵ Wherefore, when the Divine Liturgy is celebrated unto the glory, praise, and remembrance of the death and resurrection of our Lord, our brothers who

⁸² *Sacrae Liturgiae Interpretatio* 1, PG 150, 368–369A; *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 25. [Translator’s note: Bishop Nicholas of Methone writes: “The purpose of the rite is to participate in Christ and to receive life eternal. That is to say, it is for the deification of the participants” (*De Corpore et Sanguine Christi*, PG 135, 512B).]

⁸³ See the *Syntagmation* of Chrysanthos of Jerusalem (Tyrgobist: 1715).

⁸⁴ Cf. Augustine of Hippo, *Enchiridion de Fide, Spe et Charitate* 110, PL 40, 283 (NPNF [V1-03], 272), and Nicholas Cabasilas, *Sacrae Liturgiae Interpretatio* 42, PG 150, 457B-460C (*A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, 96-98).

⁸⁵ *Syntagmation Peri ton Hagion kai Hieron Mysterion* (Venice: 1591).

have fallen asleep in the faith receive, as much as possible, rest and sanctification from God. But concerning the living faithful who do not receive the divine Mysteries during the Liturgy, I am in wonder and don't know how they can be sanctified at all. The sacred Cabasilas says that they are not sanctified. Listen:

If then those living souls are ready and prepared for the Mystery, and if the Lord Who sanctifies and perfects wishes to sanctify, and desires to continue to give Himself, what can prevent such a communion? Certainly nothing. Then someone will say, if one among the living has the aforementioned good qualities in his soul, but does not approach the Mysteries, will he nevertheless receive the sanctification which they give? Not in all cases, but only if someone cannot physically approach, as it is for the souls of the dead.... If, however, someone is able to approach the Table, but does not, it is impossible for him to receive the sanctification which the Mysteries bring; not just because he did not approach, but because, being able, he did not.⁸⁶

4. Not only does everything which we have said up until now obligate every Christian that does not have an impediment to receive Communion frequently, but even divine Communion in and of itself, if we think about it, beckons each person to partake of it frequently simply because it is a constituent of the life of the soul. Let us see, however, what this means.

The scholastic theologians call Communion constitutive,

⁸⁶ *Sacrae Liturgiae Interpretatio* 42, PG 150, 457D–460A; *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, 97.

because “the constitutive” is that without which it is impossible for something that happens to happen. For example, breath is constitutive to the life of man, for, without it, man cannot live. And food is necessary for the constitution of the body. Now, just as frequent breathing is necessary for life and food is necessary for the constitution of the nature of the body, in like manner is frequent Communion necessary for the life of the soul and for the constitution of its essence; or, rather, it is incomparably more necessary.

Now let Basil the Great, that foundation of the right dogmas of the Church, come onto the scene and speak to us. He says: “The receiving of the body and blood of Christ is necessary for eternal life.”⁸⁷ And, again, he says: “He who has been reborn through Baptism must now be nourished by partaking of the divine Mysteries.... Therefore, we are now nourished with the food of eternal life, which the Son of the living God handed down to us.”⁸⁸ And again, when asked a question by a patrician woman named Caesarea, he replied to her in an epistle saying: “It is good and beneficial to commune every day, and to partake of the holy body and blood of Christ, Who clearly says: ‘Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life’ (Jn. 6:54). For who doubts that to frequently participate in life is nothing other than to have manifold life?”⁸⁹ In other words, who

⁸⁷ *Moralia* 21, PG 31, 816C; *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, 101.

⁸⁸ *De Baptismo* 1.3, PG 31, 1573A; *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, 386, 387.

⁸⁹ *Epistola* 93, PG 32, 484B; NPNF (V2-08), 179. [Translator’s note: St. Basil the Great is not alone in interpreting these words of the Savior from the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to John as referring to the Holy Eucharist. Countless other Fathers of the Church do so as well; for example, Cyprian of Carthage, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom,

doubts that to receive Communion frequently is to live in many ways, that is, to live with all of the powers and senses of the soul and body?

The monk Job the Confessor says:

It is just and right for the Christian to be sanctified frequently and many times by receiving divine Communion, and he should run to it more often, and desire to commune more than he desires to breathe. For this reason, each person has permission to receive Communion frequently, and, if it is possible, those who are worthy are not prohibited to commune every day.⁹⁰

Patriarch Gennadios of Constantinople most wisely depicts how necessary Holy Communion is for the Christian, saying: And now the Mystery brings about in those who partake of it progress in the life according to Christ. For the effects it produces physically (that is, in that the bread and wine nourish the body), it produces in an analogous way inwardly, mystically and invisibly. For the body of Christ nourishes and refreshes our soul, just as bread does the body. And just as we were reborn through Baptism and received the existence of grace in the place of the existence of sin, so by being nourished with the Mystery of Communion we are strengthened, and we remain and progress in grace. The natural heat of the body can dry out its natural hydration if the body is not

Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, John of Damaskos, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas, Nicholas Cabasilas, and Symeon of Thessaloniki—to name but a few. Moreover, the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts also interprets these words of Christ as referring to Holy Communion.]

⁹⁰ See the *Syntagmaton* of Chrysanthos.

aided by food. (For this reason the composition of the body must be preserved by food and drink, and the fluids which were lost on account of heat replenished. It is impossible for human life to be sustained even for a short while in any other way). In like manner, the heat of evil, which gnaws away at the soul by drying out the quality of piety, would certainly destroy it completely if the soul did not receive spiritual food, which thwarts the corrupting power of evil and renews and increases the spiritual gifts of God within us. The body of Christ, since it nourishes the body, and since it is united to the Divine Nature, purifies and sanctifies those who receive Communion, and grants to us sufficient spiritual nourishment. Thus, with this food we are well nourished and receive our spiritual purity and health, from which Paradisiacal health the tasting of the forbidden tree removed us.

We, then, who lost that original purity and health through bodily food, must regain it through bodily food, thus treating like with like, and opposites with opposites. That is, it was bodily food that ruined us in Paradise; and Communion is also bodily food, but which preserves us. Likewise, both health and spiritual life were corrupted then, but are now preserved. And, though then God prevented us from eating the food, now He gives us the food and urges us towards it. And the evil demon taught us regarding that food, but, concerning this food, not only is the Son of God the Counselor, but He Himself serves it. Moreover, that food was stolen by us, but we are openly called to receive this food. Further, in that food was hidden the poison of transgression, but in this food is hidden a treasury of innumerable blessings.⁹¹

So, my brothers, since we have demonstrated from these testimonies that frequent Communion is necessary for those Christians (who do not have an impediment), we also, then, have a great need to commune frequently, so that we can have life, which is Jesus Christ, in ourselves, and so that we do not die a spiritual death. For as many as are not frequently nourished by that spiritual food will most surely die. Even if it appears that they are physically alive, they are spiritually dead, because they have distanced themselves from the spiritual and true life brought about by Holy Communion.

When an infant is first born, it cries and eagerly looks for food and milk. If it does not nurse, it does not have an appetite, and this is a sign that it is sick and is in danger of death. We also must eagerly want to be nursed by the spiritual food of Holy Communion, in order to be given life. Otherwise we are in danger of dying spiritually.

For this reason, the divine Chrysostom says:

Let us not then be negligent, having been deemed worthy of such love and honor (to receive Christ's body and blood, that is). Do you not see with how much eagerness infants lay hold of the breast? With what earnest desire they fix their lips upon the nipple? With such eagerness and desire let us also approach this Table and the nipple of the spiritual Cup. Or, rather, with much greater eagerness, let us like nursing infants draw out the grace of the Spirit, and let only one thing be our sorrow – not to partake of this Food.⁹²

⁹¹ See the *Syntagmation* of Chrysanthos; *De Sacramentali Corpore Christi* 1, PG 160, 356B–357A.

⁹² *On Matthew* 82.5, PG 58, 744; NPNF (VI-10), 476-477.

END OF PREVIEW

For the full text, visit:
UncutMountainPress.com

